

Remarks by  
Dr. Donald C. Winter  
Secretary of the Navy  
Recruit Training Center Graduation  
Naval Station Great Lakes  
Great Lakes, Illinois  
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Captain Andrews, graduates, ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to be here today to personally congratulate this class of graduates, and to welcome you to the Fleet.

First, I would like to say a special thanks to the Recruit Division Commanders.

I know that your official job descriptions do not mention your roles here as disciplinarians, mentors, role models, mothers, fathers, as well as leaders to those entrusted to your care.

But you know that you are all of those things and more.

You have developed a keen appreciation for the many roles of an RDC, and for the importance of your leadership position in molding recruits into the best-trained, most capable Sailors in the world.

I want you all to know that you have done a superb job in pushing this class of boots.

The Navy puts so much emphasis on getting the right people assigned to Great Lakes for a reason—and today you can begin to see why.

Thank you, and well done!

Next, I would like to say a word to the parents of the graduating class.

Welcome to the Navy family.

Many of you are already members of the Navy family, and many of you were instrumental in encouraging today's new members to consider a military career.

Whatever your previous connections to the Navy, it is important that all of you understand that your support is critical to the Sailor's success, and to the effectiveness of the Navy.

Thank you for coming here today. Your presence speaks volumes.

By leading your young charges onto the path of service in the U.S. Navy, you have played an important role in raising the generation of young patriots who will keep

America free in the years ahead.

I urge you to continue to support these fine young Sailors throughout their many adventures in the Navy at home and abroad.

And now I would like to address the graduates.

I know that since the day you walked into that recruiter's office—perhaps with no small degree of apprehension—much has changed in your lives.

Many of your parents and close relatives—so many of whom traveled great distances to be with you today—may have shared in those feelings of apprehension when you signed the bottom line.

But I daresay that all of them, seeing you standing before us today with such confidence and professional bearing, are filled with pride in your achievement, and excitement over the adventures that lie ahead.

I find that it is always an interesting question to ask the Sailors I meet, “Why did you join the Navy?”

The most common answers I hear are:

“I wanted to see the world.”

“The Navy will help me get a college education.”

“After 9/11, I felt a desire to serve.”

“I wanted to do something with my life.”

“I wanted something besides a 9-5 desk job.”

“Serving in the Navy is a family tradition.”

I hear such responses again and again everywhere I go.

More interesting still is when I ask some of the older Sailors, “Why did you stay Navy?”

The answers vary, but I am struck by the fact that virtually all of them believe that joining the Navy was the right thing to do, that when they go home they feel proud to tell friends and family about their careers, and that service in the Navy has been a benefit to their lives and to the Nation.

I am reminded of a recent encounter I had with a first class petty officer in Detroit who had gotten out of the Navy, but who had then decided, upon further reflection, that getting out had been a huge mistake.

I asked him why.

He said that he missed the camaraderie, he missed being a part of something larger than himself, and he missed the feeling of pride he felt as a member of the military.

I think that all of you today, surrounded by family and friends, are getting a first taste of what being in the Navy means to those who serve in uniform.

I know that when I think about my own father and grandfather, who enlisted in World War I and World War II, I am always filled with pride.

They were always proud to have served, and to have devoted so many years to the United States Navy.

All of you voluntarily joined the Navy after 9/11—during a time of war, and during a time when great demands are being made on those who wear the uniform.

War is an ugly thing, but America is a great country—and our freedoms and our way of life are worth defending.

Do not forget that we have been tested before and that we have faced great challenges in our history.

Thanks to people like you, we will again rise to the occasion—and prevail.

In dangerous times, and on occasions such as this one, I am reminded of one of my favorite Theodore Roosevelt quotes.

Theodore Roosevelt, by the way, before he became president, was an Assistant Secretary of the Navy and a passionate believer in the importance of having a strong Navy.

In any case, President Roosevelt was also a constant supporter of those who acted—as opposed to those who stood back and criticized those who did.

In Roosevelt's words:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends

himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

I say to you that you are all in the arena, doers of deeds, and making history as a part of the United States Navy.

You are embarked on a noble endeavor, and I challenge you to dare greatly as you carry out your duties in defense of a great Nation.

Congratulations to all of you.

God bless you and your families, and may God bless America!